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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000410

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DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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SUBJECT: THERE ARE NEITHER MODERATES NOR HARDLINERS IN THE
NCP

REF: A. KHARTOUM 355

¶B. KHARTOUM 338

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: The NCP regime is unified and well organized despite its corruption, and the popular characterizations of regime "hardliners" versus "moderates" are overplayed, according to opposition observers who have known individuals in the NCP regime for decades. These opposition members also complain that the NCP has suffocated all opposition by buying off key opposition members and dividing opposition party leadership while endlessly negotiating "agreements" that only serve to further weaken the opposition. End summary.

¶12. (C) During polchief's recent meetings with opposition leaders in Khartoum, a common picture emerged of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and its relationship with the opposition parties. Al Siddiq Al Turabi, son of Popular Congress Party (PCP) leader and former NIF hardliner (and founding member of Al Bashir's Islamist regime) Hassan Al Turabi, described in detail his understanding of the NCP regime and its inner workings. Contrary to the popular view of the NCP as a divided party in which hardliners and moderates vie for influence while a mercurial President Al Bashir waffles between these two power centers, Al Turabi said that all NCP regime insiders with true power are cut from the same cloth and have only small differences in views to distinguish them. "Those with true power are the hardliners," said Turabi, because it is their job to protect the interests of the party and the regime. In his view, President Al Bashir, NCP Secretary General Nafie, NISS chief Ghosh, and Minister of Defense Hussein are the four strongest individuals in the regime and are therefore the "hardliners" only in terms of their power and interest in protecting the regime (such a lineup significantly excludes VP Taha). Turabi said the idea that Bashir is some sort of puppet and relies on others beneath him is false. "Bashir has consolidated his power and remains fully in control of the elements in his regime," said Turabi. The only thing Bashir worries about, said Turabi, is that elements in the military would seek to overthrow him if there is dissatisfaction with the elections or the referendum. However Turabi predicted that most northerners would accept the peaceful secession of the South.

¶13. (C) Turabi also pointed out that each individual in the regime has been designated to play a specific role. Nafie may be viewed as a hardliner because he maintains party discipline and normally has the last word on policy, but only because his role gives him this power. Former Finance

Minister (and now Energy Minister) Al Zubeir may have seemed a hardliner because he would not release the NEC containers for the US Embassy, but only because he was instructed to do so. The seemingly moderate and polished negotiators that are empowered to interact regularly with the Americans and the SPLM (Taha, Salahudin, Al Khatib, Dirdeiry, Bebiker) are merely playing the role they have been given by the regime. There may be debates regarding when and how to interact with the West, but decisions are determined purely by party and regime interests. Turabi claimed that the only guiding ideology of the regime at this point is continued the cynical access to power and wealth, and Al Bashir and his top advisors focus exclusively on strategies to maintain their positions.

¶4. (C) In a separate meeting with polchief, Umma party Deputy Secretary General Abdel Nabi made similar points regarding

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the power players in the regime, but added some nuance to the picture. The main point of debate is whether the regime needed to sign the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 in order to stay in power. Nabi pointed out that even though Vice President Ali Osman Taha had and still retains significant influence in the party and the regime, he was under severe pressure during and after the Naivasha negotiations and many are still against him "and to this day he's not part of what's going on." Nabi recounted that Taha left the country for several months two years ago (reportedly to Turkey) and did not return until summoned by President Bashir. With regard to regime insiders being "cut from the same cloth" in Turabi's words, Nabi pointed out that the regime insiders are all from the same part of the country and same three tribes, are all of the same generation, all went to the same schools (many in the US in the 1970s and 1980s during the Nimeiry years) and all grew out of the same NIF movement (with Turabi) in the late 1980s.

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¶5. (C) Both opposition leaders complained that the NCP has suffocated the opposition parties. Turabi was honest that the opposition is weak and divided and has been exploited by the regime when necessary (for example in its negotiations with the SPLM). Turabi said it is well known that the NCP has bought off senior members of the Umma and DUP parties (though he did not say whether his father's PCP party had been similarly corrupted). Turabi laughed at the recent "agreement" between the Umma party and the NCP, and predicted that this will only lead to defections by Umma members into the government. Turabi said the NCP's goal is to divide opposition party leadership while endlessly negotiating false "agreements" that only serve to further weaken the opposition. Turabi thought it unlikely that the opposition would be able to mount an effective campaign against the NCP, and predicted that the NCP and the SPLM would likely continue to control their respective parts of the country and that ultimately the South would secede (which he said the North would likely accept). Nabi remained optimistic said the Umma party will be able to organize the opposition against the NCP, but only if the SPLM allows the Umma party to lead the coalition against the NCP in the North. "The most productive coalition would be with the SPLM and other marginalized parties from Darfur, because most of our members are from marginalized areas of the country." The Umma party hopes that elections will occur, said Nabi, so that the NCP will be forced to make some concessions. Without elections, or with an SPLM-NCP partnership (to protect the CPA) there will be less opportunity for concessions to the Umma and other parties.

¶6. (C) Comment: These observations track with what we hear from other observers in Khartoum - that the NCP regime is a corrupt oligarchy determined to hold onto power by any means.

Non-political observers in the business community also share the view of the NCP not as a regime with hardliners and

moderates, but merely as a regime with powerful and less powerful actors -- and individuals who have been selected to play certain roles -- whose main goal is to protect the stability and longevity of the regime and steal as much money as possible while doing so.

FERNANDEZ